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THE AURORA KARAKUL SHEEP CO.

BREEDERS OF KARAKUL SHEEP

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(3852)

THE KARAKUL

KARAKUL sheep are fur-bearing sheep. Their native home is in Central Asia in the Province of Bokhara, a country lying between Turkestan and Afghanistan, about 600 miles east of the Caspian Sea. The name Karakul as applied to the sheep is taken from Kara Kul (Black Lake), a village in Bokhara.

This country is more or less barren with very little rainfall, the summers being very hot and dry. Vegetation is extremely scant. The winters are very severe, with temperature often far below zero and the ground heavily covered with snow. With these extremes in climate, together with other natural causes, we find developed a very hardy type of sheep. In fact, they have much in their favor to gain for themselves the title of the hardiest domestic sheep known.

The origin of this type of sheep is somewhat obscure. Two great classes of sheep have inhabited central and western Asia for centuries. They belong to the fat-rump and the broad-tail types. The Karakul breeds belong to the broad-tail type and are said to have sprung from a cross between the black long-tailed Danadar sheep (now nearly extinct), and the fat-rump sheep. There are three main types of the Karakul sheep—Arabi, Shiraz, and Duzbai. The Arabi sheep are small fur-bearing sheep, supposedly from Arabia. They are not very numerous. The Shiraz or white Persian fur sheep are gray in color and produce the valuable Krimmer fur. It is the Karakul of the Duzbai type that gives the finest and closest curl to the fur.

Karakuls of the Duzbai type are large sheep. Generally, the rams are horned and the ewes are hornless. The head is long and narrow, and the nose very arching, being a pronounced Roman nose. The ears are of medium size and pendant. The withers are high and quite prominent. The body is somewhat long and fairly deep, the loin is broad, the rump very sloping. The tail is broad, flat, and extremely fat, often weighing from ten to twenty pounds in mature males. The bone is strong, clean, and not too large. The mutton is of excellent quality.

The Karakul is a very hardy type of sheep. Because of its natural environment it is well adapted to sections of extreme temperature and limited rainfall. It is of great value for crossing with range sheep and with our medium-wooled breeds. The resulting lambs are exceptionally large and strong at birth; they are very thrifty and develop rapidly,

KARAKUL SHEEP

easily weighing close to 100 pounds when in ripe condition for the market. Lambs can easily be made to gain one pound a day for the first sixty days. Both the pure-breds and the grades are well suited for hillside land pasture, as they are good grazers, being able to make large growth on rough, scant pasture.

The ewes are quite prolific. They breed regularly, and in some cases twice a year, although this is not desirable from the standpoint of best results in maintaining vigor and size of the breeds.

The color at birth is, in nearly every case, jet black—a color much preferred. Occasionally a lamb is born that has a white spot on the head or tail, or both. At birth and up to three to five days, the lambs have a coat of very close, lustrous fur. It is this fur, known as Persian lamb fur, which is so valuable and in such demand. To be of greatest value, the fur should show a tight-curling lustrous condition and be jet black in color. The beauty of the pattern formed by the irregular arrangement of the curls, and the fineness and softness of the coat also adds much to its value. The desired condition of the skin of the lamb soon disappears as it grows older. Even when a day or two old, the curls begin to loosen and the fleece grows in length; as the lamb nears six months the color gradually changes to gray.

The first importation of Karakul sheep to the United States was made in 1908 by Dr. C. C. Young, a native Russian and a naturalized citizen. In this importation there were five rams and ten ewes. These were secured, after overcoming many difficulties, at a cost of over \$25,000. A second lot of these sheep were brought to America by Dr. Young in the spring of 1913. This importation consisted of eleven rams and six ewes. A third, and probably the last importation of Karakuls which will ever come to America, was made in 1914, consisting of fifteen rams and six ewes. In 1914, The Agnew Syndicate and Royal Investment Co., of Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island, brought out a flock of Karakuls and Duzbais, which were purchased in the vicinity of Old Bokhara. These left Lebau, a Russian seaport, some ten days before the City was bombarded by the Germans. For some reason the cargo of sheep was transferred to another vessel in the North Sea, and after many hair-breadth escapes, the vessel, manned by a German crew, were obliged to put into the port of St. John, Newfoundland.

The importers were unable to land this flock in Canada and it was kept in Newfoundland for two years. It numbered some 130 head of the best Persian lamb fur flocks of Bokhara and Western Turkestan.

We now note that the total number of Karakuls imported by Dr. Young to the United States are fifty-three head. Of this number thirty-one were rams and twenty-two ewes. Altogether, some 180 head have been brought to America.

KARAKUL SHEEP

From what has been said it is plain that the Karakul sheep do not appear to us among breeds such as for instance the English and others, as a strongly developed classical breed with a very precise standard. The Karakul sheep were not developed as a classical breed.

When the Great World War came the Province of Bokhara was ravaged by conquest, followed by disease, poverty and pestilence. Most animals were slaughtered for food and clothing and the Karakul Breed of sheep was practically exterminated.

A MUTTON RECORD.

Total Number Inspected.

Cattle		Hogs		Sheep	
10,000,938		26,916,363		13,005,502	
Condemned		Condemned		Condemned	
Carcasses	Parts	Carcasses	Parts	Carcasses	Parts
27,390	49,393	31,517	870,361	None	None

The mental, physical and financial condition of humanity will be improved by using mutton as their meat food.

In some specimens of the breed there is a noticeable amount of finer and softer wool near the skin. This undercoat is not desired in breeding animals, as it is stated that lambs having the best curl and luster come from parents having the least fine wool. Karakul fleeces are commonly sold as carpet wool. A pronounced glossiness of the hair of the face and legs and evidence of curls on these are regarded as indications of ability to produce lambs with skins of good luster and curled all over.

The development of the fur sheep industry in America is in its infancy and perhaps because of this fact, coupled with the great demand for "Persian fur" skins, the future of this new branch of sheep husbandry is very bright. There is much to be learned regarding the breeding and management of this type of sheep. Considerable knowledge has been gained about them since their first importation. Two important points stand out as quite definitely established: first, that the pure-bred Karakul sheep can be kept successfully and economically under American conditions as far as climate, soil, feeding, and housing are concerned; second, that pure-bred Karakul rams crossed on ewes of certain of our native sheep produce lambs of which a very large percentage possess skins that grade high as "Persian lamb fur."

KARAKUL SHEEP

The United States imports about \$14,000,000 worth of Astrakhan Persian Lamb, and Krimmer fur each year. American farmers might just as well have that money, and much more. The popularity of these furs in this country would mean a much larger market for them if the industry were brought home. There can be no doubt of an increasing demand for furs of all kinds. The American people are facing a condition in which the supply of furs is entirely inadequate to the demands. So there not only is an unsatisfied demand for furs of all sorts, but there is an opportunity, by bringing the sheep industry home, of creating a larger demand if the supply should warrant it.

The skins obtained from crossing Karakul rams with common sheep range from three dollars to ten dollars, and average from five to six dollars per skin.

The demand for half-blood Karakul ewes is far beyond the supply, and more than one hundred head were sold last year at \$250 per head.

The production of half-bloods for fur and breeding is a growing and profitable industry. That this last point is of much concern to all owners of native sheep, whether pure-bred or grade, will be manifest when we note that according to the United States Government reports the imports of raw skins for "Persian lamb fur" amounted to the enormous sum of \$14,000,000 in 1914. Because of the uncertainty of the shipments from across the water, there is a great opportunity for this industry; because of the limited number of pure-bred Karakul rams and their high value, it will be advantageous to breed these rams to sheep of our domestic breeds. The breeds best adapted for this work are the long, coarse-wool breeds, especially the Black Faced Highland, Cotswold, Lincoln, and Leicester. Selected and tested Karakul rams should be used, as this will insure greater success.

Since the number of Karakul skins available for fur purposes from American sheep ranches is infinitesimal compared with the needs of the trade, the American fur industry must look ahead. We all recognize the serious problem that faces the industry in the diminishing numbers of wild animals and when a possibility of propagating future supplies of fur-bearers presents itself we should in self-defence receive it with real interest and active support.

With regard to the present general conditions of the Karakul industry, it may be remarked that in later years there has been noticed in general a considerable increase of interest in this branch of the fur industry, occasioned by an increased demand for furs and similar material.

The increased demand caused an excessive increase in the price, but did not cause the introduction of any measures looking to the preservation, encouragement and further extension in Asia and Southern

KARAKUL SHEEP

Russia of this so profitable breed of sheep. Thus the prices of Karakul fur during the last fifteen years have risen 140 per cent, and thoroughbred sheep and rams which formerly were worth \$200 to \$500, judging by given estimates, are now sold from \$500 to \$1200.

The hides of the lambs of the Karakul sheep, on account of their special qualities hold an entirely exclusive place in the world's fur market. The Karakul seems to be the only fur which is common among all civilized nations, and besides the only fur which is worn by persons of both sexes and of all classes, old and young. On the strength of its qualities, its general form, beauty and desirability, together with its comparative cheapness, the Karakul fur has almost become one of man's necessities of life, and for this reason fashions cannot fluctuate much with reference to Karakul in the world's markets. The world-renowned furs are the almost exclusive gift of one comparatively small oasis in Turkestan. Up to date the only place in the world that has produced these "Black Rose" furs has been the Province of Bokhara, and the chief market-place of the furs, the market of Nym Novgorod.

Of equal importance, perhaps, is the fact that crossing Karakuls on native sheep results in a great increase in weight.

If the hybrids produced follow the Mendelian law of inheritance it will be possible by crossing the half-bloods back to the pure Karakuls to get any number of pure-bred Karakuls without the necessity of importing more rams from Asia. But if the hybrids of pure strains in the second generation do not split up into pure-bred Karakuls and pure-bred Lincolns according to the Mendelian law, but blend and breed true, then a new breed of sheep will result. Such a breed, if it should combine the good qualities of the Karakul and of some native breeds, would be a valuable one for this country.

As a fur producer the Karakul Sheep easily surpass all other fur producing animals. Being fully domesticated the male will mate one hundred or more females in one season. The Karakul ewe will produce twice a year when her lambs are killed for fur. The skin of a prematurely born lamb is valuable, but the mother is never killed to obtain the pelt.

The future of the Karakul sheep industry lies in the hands of the large sheep ranchers, providing the sheep ranchers are thoroughly convinced that it will pay them to buy Karakul rams and that they can find an immediate market for their Karakul lamb skins.

Herein lies the work for the fur trade. Those who can look ahead and have the ambition and capital to work with the sheep men will be the ones to reap the profits a few years from now.

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